



**Statement on Finland and Sweden NATO Accession**  
**Senator Susan M. Collins**  
**August 3, 2022**

I rise in strong support of the accession of Finland and Sweden into the NATO alliance.

In May, I visited Helsinki and Stockholm as part of a Senate delegation to encourage the Finnish and Swedish efforts to join the alliance. Our trip, however, started in Ukraine. There, after a long, secret journey under cover of darkness, our contingent of four Senators met with President Zelenskyy for two hours.

We discussed the military, humanitarian, economic, and security consequences of Russia's unprovoked, brutal war against Ukraine. I asked President Zelenskyy whether he thought Vladimir Putin's attack on his country had had the opposite effect of what he had intended. For example, the Russian-speaking sections of Eastern Ukraine are now embracing their Ukrainian identity, and NATO is more united than ever. President Zelenskyy told me that Putin's war of aggression not only had been the opposite of the easy conquest that Putin had expected, but also had strengthened the NATO alliance and the European Union.

Mr. President, one cannot understate how Russia's invasion of Ukraine has upended decades, and in the case of Sweden, centuries, of security policy for these countries. For 200 years, Sweden has maintained a policy of neutrality. But, as Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson put it to me, "Feb. 24 changed everything." That was the date of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Finland, which shares an 830-mile border with Russia, likewise concluded that Russia's aggression required a dramatic re-thinking of its security. To demonstrate the reality on the ground, the Finnish President took us outside of his home and pointed to his right where Tallinn, Estonia, is only 50 miles away across the Baltic Sea. He then pointed to his left and told us St. Petersburg, Russia, is only 200 miles away.

Our visits to these leaders came just as the parliaments of Finland and Sweden were voting to formally request admission into NATO. We assured their leaders that there was strong, bipartisan support in the Senate for their accession, and that adding their capabilities to the alliance would improve, would strengthen, our collective defense and security. And this is indeed an important point.

Sweden and Finland will both bring enormous geographic advantages and military capabilities to NATO. Finland is expected to exceed NATO's 2% defense spending target this year, and Sweden has committed to meeting that target as soon as possible. Finland has the

largest reserve military force in Europe and has recently decided to upgrade its current fleet of American F-18 fighter jets with the fifth generation F-35. For the past several years, Sweden has been increasing its arms spending, and the country has advanced defense industrial capabilities. The addition of both these nations to NATO will bolster deterrence against Russia in the Arctic, Nordic, and Baltic regions.

For decades, Finland and Sweden have had a strong history of support for NATO. Their advanced militaries are, for example, interoperable with member nations. Both countries also have supported NATO-led operations over the decades, including in Afghanistan, Kosovo, and Iraq. They frequently participate in Alliance-led exercises and capacity-building operations in Africa and elsewhere.

During the current crisis in Ukraine, Finland and Sweden have been invaluable partners to the Ukrainians. They have been sending vital military aid to Ukraine as well as humanitarian assistance since February, including anti-ship missiles, rifles, body armor, and anti-tank weapons.

There are a few critics who contend that this NATO expansion, which would more than double NATO's direct border with Russia, is somehow "provocative" to Vladimir Putin. This assertion ignores a clear pattern of Russian aggression extending back years. In 2008, Russia invaded its neighbor Georgia. In 2014, Russia invaded Ukraine for the first time, occupying and seizing Crimea and areas of Eastern Ukraine. Then earlier this year, of course, Russia launched the largest, and most devastating, land war in Europe since World War II without any justification or provocation when it invaded the free and democratic nation of Ukraine. This expansion of NATO is warranted precisely because of Russian provocations across the region. As always, NATO and the United States have no desire to see a war with Russia, but we will defend the territory and sovereignty of each of its members.

Russia's brutal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine has permanently changed the European security environment. Enlarging NATO to include two of our most capable and supportive European allies, Finland and Sweden, is a necessary and deliberative response. I urge all of my colleagues, in a strong vote, to join me in the swift ratification of Finland and Sweden's accession into NATO.